



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 43.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
JUNE 27, 2024

Motion by:

**DIRECTORS MITCHELL, SANDOVAL, SOLIS, NAJARIAN, DUPONT-WALKER, AND BASS**

Expanding the LIFE Program through Technology Motion

Related to Item 41: TAP Plus

Metro’s Low Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) program makes available affordable and accessible transportation to many of Metro’s riders who would qualify. Year over year, low-income riders and people of color continue to make up the vast majority of Metro’s ridership. The 2022 Customer Experience Survey showed that almost 80 percent of riders identify as Latinx/Hispanic or Black, and 75 percent are from low-income households. They have made up the agency’s core ridership even before the COVID-19 pandemic and are now driving ridership recovery post-pandemic.

LIFE is the primary program residents rely on to access discounted and free rides to travel not only on Metro’s system, but also on 14 participating transit operators across the region. Launched in 2019, the program has demonstrated tremendous success, but not without continued adjustment and iteration to expand the program’s reach. Per Board motion in 2021 (2021-0627), Metro staff overhauled the program’s enrollment process by streamlining the application system to enable on-the-spot enrollment and self-certification, including 90 days of unlimited free rides to incentive enrollment. With these efforts, enrollment is just under 313,000 riders, more than triple the goal set out in the motion.

There are still more riders the agency can reach. Minimizing enrollment barriers has proven that entry into the program is a key leverage point to maximize the program’s reach and utilization. Three years since the program’s enrollment overhaul, it is ripe for new strategies to meet the growing need among Metro’s riders. Potential LIFE enrollees can currently use their existing enrollment in other social benefit programs to self-certify into the LIFE program. The agency could take that concept further through the upcoming upgrades to TAP technology which will allow customers to not be solely reliant on Metro fare media to access the system. By working with qualifying social benefit programs, Metro could enable social benefit cards such as the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to serve as a TAP card that recognizes the user as LIFE-eligible and provides immediate access to Metro’s transit system.

With TAP Plus’s fare payment upgrades, including its account-based functionality to autoloading

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discounted fare, the LIFE program is poised to expand its enrollment strategies through cross-agency collaboration-ushering in the future of the LIFE program.

**SUBJECT: EXPANDING THE LIFE PROGRAM THROUGH TECHNOLOGY MOTION**

**RECOMMENDATION**

APPROVE Motion by Mitchell, Sandoval, Solis, Najarian, Dupont-Walker, and Bass that the Board direct the Chief Executive Officer to:

- A. Include social benefit cards as fare media as part of Phase II account-based system launch of TAP Plus. If unable to implement as part of Phase II launch, report to the Board on reasons for the delay.
- B. Coordinate with relevant federal, state, and County agencies, such as the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, to make necessary technical and system upgrades to TAP in order to:
  - 1. Enroll members into LIFE upon qualification without undergoing an additional LIFE application; and
  - 2. Enable social benefit cards (when upgraded to contactless EMV - Europay, Master card, Visa) to be used in lieu of Metro fare media to access the Metro's system and LIFE's free and discounted rides.
- C. Report back in September 2024 with an update on the LIFE program enrollment strategy and TAP system upgrades, including a progress update on the above that includes but is not limited to:
  - 1. Social benefit programs identified for automatic LIFE enrollment, including availability of a social benefit card;
  - 2. Technical and system upgrades along with supportive state or federal legislative actions required to enable utilization of social benefit cards as fare media by respective social benefit programs;
  - 3. Capabilities and upgrade requirements to Metro's TAP system to use social benefit cards;
  - 4. A plan to implement automatic LIFE enrollment and social benefit card utilization as fare media
- D. Include in all future board reports on TAP Plus upgrades a specific section outlining progress on enabling TAP system compatibility with social benefit card utilization as fare media.

(CARRIED OVER FROM THE MAY REGULAR BOARD MEETING)